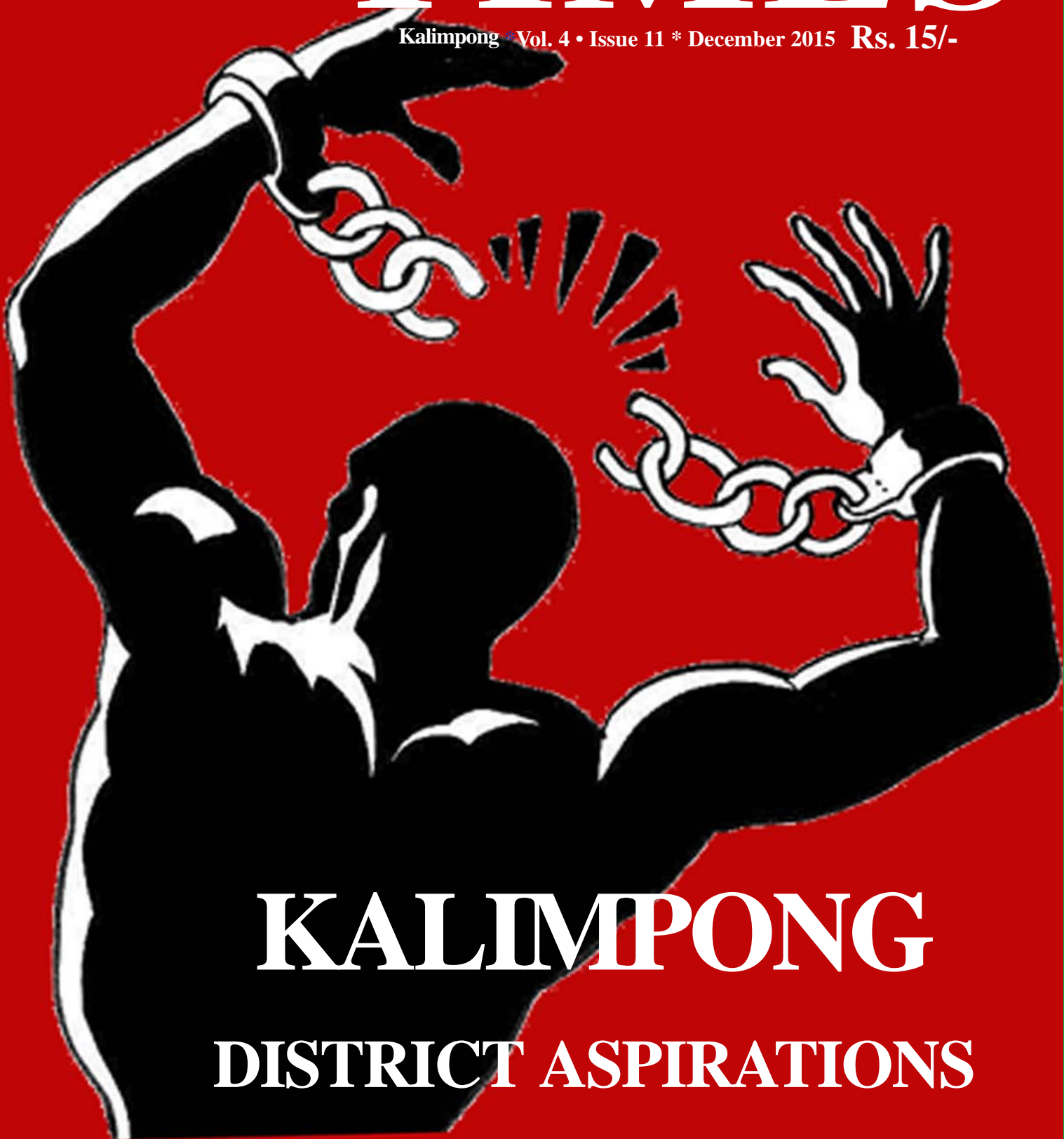


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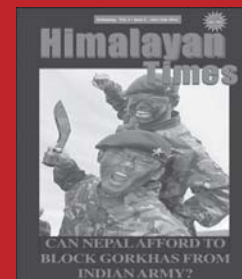
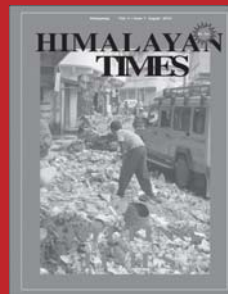
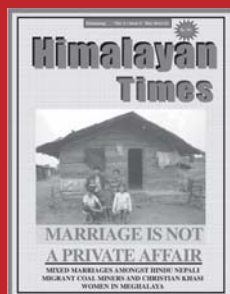
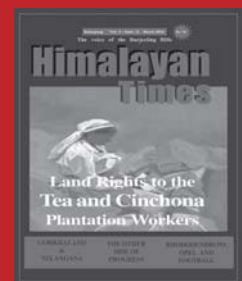
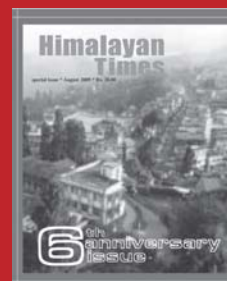
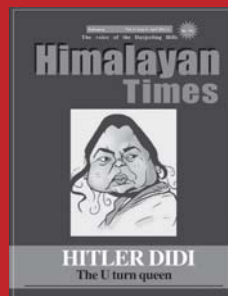
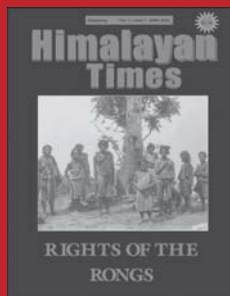
KALIMPONG

DISTRICT ASPIRATIONS

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WHERE WE DARE TO SPEAK...



COVERSTORY

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KALIMPONG DISTRICT ASPIRATIONS

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The Gorkha-ness of the Nepalis will be the greatest enabler to confront the devastation caused by the earthquake..
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WITH THE HOPE TO COME AGAIN



One day I found a report about a small railway that climbed the slopes of the Himalayan range beginning its travel where tigers were still living and reaching a little town, just in front of the highest mountains of the world..writes
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Sandip C. Jain

KALIMPONG-

Cover Story

DISTRICT ASPIRATIONS

Somehow as I start to write this article, one very oft used Nepali phrase seems to be stuck to my mind—"Kanchi Ama Ko Chora" ... when translated into English it would mean "Step Mothers Son".. I don't know if this phrase actually is relevant to this article or whether even if our mothers were the same or different but then, I cannot but help being slave to this phrase at this moment. This article is about Kalimpong Sub Divisions demand for being elevated into a District and when any person or place or organization raises any demand, then the question of WHY arises- probably this "Kanchi Ama ko Chora" phrase so stubbornly stuck to my mind at this moment, is one of my responses in an attempt to answer WHY.. Anyway I will come to this later, let's dive into the history of this region to initiate Kalimpong's claims to a new District.

Kalimpong does not have a very long history- in fact this is the 150th year of its incorporation into the Indian Union. Its name can be roughly translated in Lepcha as "Ridges where we play" and it isn't without reasons why it is called so. In the not so distant past this was the playground of the rich and famous, the king and nobles, the scholars and historians, the lamas and the bhikshus, the spies and

the renegades, traders and the missionaries.... It has been a place of mystery and intrigue, it has been a place of trade and studies and it has been a place of conspiracies and religion. Its connections are such that very few towns of this little size can boast of.. it can brag of its association with the King of Bhutan, the King of Nepal, the King of Burma, the Prince of Greece and Denmark, the Prince and Princess of Afghanistan, the Dalai Lama, the King of Sikkim and the Kazi and Kazinee of Sikkim. It can bask in the glory of having associations with Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore, Vinoda Bhawe, Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Kalimpong was definitely one of the most famous and popular or maybe even unpopular or infamous (remember

nest of spies???) small towns in India at those times.



Even in this age and time of Technology, EVMs, superior road connectivity etc etc, there are places in the sub division of Kalimpong where Polling Parties which conduct Elections, have to leave two days in advance just to set up the infrastructure to conduct the Polls.

Currently the District of Darjeeling comprises of four sub divisions- Darjeeling, Kurseong, Siliguri and Kalimpong with Kalimpong being the largest of the four sub-divisions with an area of 1056 square km. The total area of the current Darjeeling District is 3149 square km which mean the sub division of Kalimpong occupies more than one-third of the total land mass in the district of Darjeeling. Though collecting data on the size of sub-divisions in West Bengal for the sake of comparing the size of sub-divisions proved a very tedious affair, it may be claimed with much authority that Kalimpong is definitely one of the largest sub-divisions in the

State. With three Blocks(Kalimpong 1, Kalimpong 2 and Gorubathan), 42 Gram Panchayats(Kalimpong 1-18 gram Panchayats, Kalimpong 2- 13 Gram Panchayats and Gorubathan- 11 Gram Panchayats), Kalimpong is a huge sub- division even by National Standards. Considering the remoteness of the far flung areas under Kalimpong sub-division, it is a logistic nightmare for the administrators based in the town of Kalimpong. There are places like Todaay and Tangta which are almost a full days drive away. Even places like Tinsimana in the Neora National Park, which is the border between Bhutan, Sikkim and West Bengal falls in the sub division of Kalimpong and its about two days of walking from Lava, the nearest hamlet. Even in this age and time of Technology, EVMs, superior road connectivity etc etc, there are places in the sub division of Kalimpong where Polling Parties who conduct Elections, have to leave two days in advance just to set up the infrastructure to conduct the Polls. As per Election Department published documents there are 18 booths in Kalimpong sub division where the Polling Party has to be deployed on P-2 (means two days in advance). The furthest Polling Station from Kalimpong town

being Tangta Primary School ,which is 156km by vehicle and then a further 10 km by foot. The plight of people staying in these areas is pathetic to say the least- imagine yourself living in Tangta and having to correct a small mistake in your Ration Card or having to renew your Driving License. It takes you one day to come to Kalimpong, one day to get your work done and one day to return. Ok maybe you can return back the second day but even then, it's a total waste of two full days and to cap it, it involves staying over in Kalimpong overnight. This fact is being pointed out only just to bring out the vastness and remoteness of this sub-division. Had Kalimpong been a district with maybe two or three sub divisions under it, then

things would have been so much more easier. The sub-division of Kalimpong literally starts from Sikkim and ends in Bhutan. The area of Kalimpong sub-division boarders four Districts- three in Sikkim, and Jalpaiguri- I may be wrong but my assumption is that no other sub-division in West Bengal can stake claim to such a unique position. Considering this very fact, Kalimpong is a fit case for being upgraded into a District.

Consider all the positives that will emerge out of Kalimpong being upgraded into a District- 1. Consider all the job opportunities that will be thrown up- At least a hundred Government jobs will be created and probably an equal number of private job opportunities. 2. Consider the time that will be saved by Kalimpong residents not having to commute to Darjeeling for every single petty work at the District Headquarters. 3. Consider not having to go to Darjeeling several times just to attend a hearing at the District court. 4. Consider the increased funding that will come into Kalimpong. The list is endless...



In fact if Kalimpong is made into a District it definitely will not be the smallest District in West Bengal. Districts like Kolkata and Howrah would be smaller in size to the new District of Kalimpong. The new District Alipurduar is actually just slightly larger than the area of present day sub division of Kalimpong.

West Bengal is a medium sized State in India- out of the 29 states in India; it is about 14th in order of size. Immediately after Independence, West Bengal was formed with 11 districts out of which Darjeeling was one. In 1950 Cooch Behar was made into a District, in 1956 Purulia was formed, In 2002, Midnapur was divided into East and West Midnapur, in 1986, 24 Pargana was bifurcated into North and South Districts and like-wise in 1992, North and South Dinajpur were reconstitutes as two different Districts. The last District to be made in West Bengal was of course next door Alipurduar just last year. With the creation of Alipurduar as a District now West Bengal has 20 Districts and has a total of 72 sub divisions. This means that the average size of a

District in West Bengal is about 4435 square km which is far larger than the present size of Kalimpong Sub-Division. But then Districts in the States of Indian are created from the sake of Administrative convenience not on the basis of size. In fact if Kalimpong is made into a District it definitely will not be the smallest District in West Bengal. Districts like Kolkata and Howrah would be smaller in size to the new District of Kalimpong. The new District Alipurduar is actually just slightly larger than the area of present day sub division of Kalimpong.

Kalimpong has been fairly unique in many ways and has always been that spark that kick started almost all events, whether Political, Social, Literary or Intellectual, in the Hills of Darjeeling. Its uniqueness stems from the fact that Kalimpong has had a past very unlike Darjeeling or Kurseong. Darjeeling and Kurseong and most other parts of the present day District Darjeeling, except Kalimpong sub division, have their history linked to Sikkim and Nepal while Kalimpong has its history linked with Bhutan. It was only after the Anglo- Bhutanese War of 1864 and the subsequent Treaty of Sinchula that Kalimpong became a part of British India while Darjeeling and Kurseong had already been incorporated into the British India Empire thirty years earlier. After being annexed from Bhutan, Kalimpong was actually put under the Western Duars District and only later was Kalimpong merged into the District Darjeeling. In fact even after being merged into the District of Darjeeling, there were several rules and regulations which were unique only to Kalimpong. Several sets of rules and regulations which were applicable in Darjeeling were not applicable to Kalimpong. Even the British Rulers of that time had realized the uniqueness of Kalimpong.

In present days too, Kalimpong has retained its exclusivity as well as its

reputation as the Engine of the Darjeeling Hills. It is still the place wherefrom most intellects, artists and ideas come out. It is still the place wherefrom most of the creativity in the Hills of Darjeeling emerges. It is still the place which sustains all Political agitations and activities in the Hills of Darjeeling. Sadly, the leadership in Darjeeling, whether Political, Social or Administrative fail to realize this or maybe realize it but choose not to accept the same for reasons of insecurity.

The present day rulers in the State too seem to realize this if one is to judge it from the angle of the creation of all the Development Boards. Had Kalimpong not been so different and unique, had Kalimpong not been the place from where all ideas and creativity came from, had Kalimpong not been a place of importance, would all Development Boards like the Lepcha, Tamang, Mangar or Sherpa Development Boards have had their headquarters in Kalimpong?? Looking from the reverse angle, had the people of Kalimpong not felt the strongest pinch, had Kalimpong not been the most deprived, had

Kalimpong not been the most affected, would the shrillest cries for these Development Boards come from Kalimpong?

Here I come back again to the phrase that is still stuck to my mind- ***Kanchi Ama ko Chora-***

Now I do not mean to say all Kanchi Amas are evil or act with bias against their step children- I am a prime example of someone who is a direct beneficiary of one such generous, selfless, noble and bighearted so called ***Kanchi Ama***. But generally speaking, this phrase denotes discrimination and the Political and Administrative big bosses based in Darjeeling sure make citizens of Kalimpong



In fact even after being merged into the District of Darjeeling, there were several rules and regulations which were unique only to Kalimpong. Several sets of rules and regulations which were applicable in Darjeeling were not applicable to Kalimpong. Even the British Rulers of that time had realized the uniqueness of Kalimpong.

somehow feel that they are being discriminated. All major developmental projects, all major fundings, all major social activities, all major infrastructural schemes are cornered by Darjeeling or Kurseong while all Kalimpong can do is see and sulk. Despite being the largest sub-division in the Darjeeling District, it receives the smallest fund allocations from the District as well as GTA administration. The sad part is that there is no one in Kalimpong who cares or dares to speak on this crucial issue. One very significant reason for this is the lack of a strong leader in Kalimpong who can talk for Kalimpong and stand up to the ever biased attitude of the leadership in Darjeeling. Not that Kalimpong does not have capable and efficient leaders- the fact is that the Central leadership in Darjeeling, since the early 1960s till today appears to be too insecure to let any efficient, able and strong leader in Kalimpong flourish. This fact is so blatant that Kalimpong has had leaders from outside actually publically bad-mouthing, insulting and belittling the local leaders of Kalimpong, right at our doorstep. Sometimes I wonder if the old joke describing Darjeeling as *Beula* (Bridegroom), Kurseong as *Janti* (Wedding Guests) and Kalimpong as *Jantu* (Cattle) is actually true...

It is hence natural that the feeling of having a separate District is gaining much momentum in Kalimpong. Probably creating a new district in these Hills would also help the cause of a separate state in the future. Two districts rather than one would provide a better platform for a new state.

Some may interpret this piece as trying to wedge a divide between Darjeeling and Kalimpong. They cannot be further from the truth if this is their interpretation- On the contrary, the upgrading of Kalimpong Sub division into a District would further cement ties between the two towns and foster

a healthier relation between the two based on mutual trust and respect and it would provide a better and firmer ground atop which the demand for a separate state could be placed on.

To conclude I need to make two things crystal clear, not just to share my views with you but also so that people with half baked knowledge of English do not interpret this article negatively. The first being that I am a very passionate and strong supporter of a new state for the Darjeeling Hills. I sincerely believe that ultimately the Darjeeling Hills have to separate from the main land of West Bengal for its overall development. And I will support anyone and any party that is willing to further this demand. It the present Political scenario of the Hills, the GJM is the strongest party and hence the loudest voice in furthering this cause- this by default means I am a supporter of GJM, which probably I am. But this does not mean I cannot support the demand for a separate district status for Kalimpong. These are two separate issues and I have every right to support both these issues.

The second of course is the fact that in my writings above

I have passionately written about Darjeeling discriminating against Kalimpong. I hope it is understood that by Darjeeling I mean the Political Class and Administrative Class based in Darjeeling and not the people of Darjeeling. Some of my best friends are from Darjeeling and the warmth and love they have for Kalimpong cannot be disputed.

I sincerely wish and pray that my very good and dear friend Roshni Tamang of Heritage Road, Darjeeling, does not interpret this article as anti Darjeeling. If she does then the delicious and sumptuous meals she feeds me with each time I am in Darjeeling, is at stake so is my friendship with her, which is just too precious for me to lose whether it be for a State or a District... ■■



The upgrading of Kalimpong Sub division into a District would further cement ties between the two towns and foster a healthier relation between the two based on mutual trust and respect and it would provide a better and firmer ground atop which the demand for a separate state could be placed on...

The spirit of 200 years of the fierce, fearless Gorkha warriors will guide Nepal in its hour of crisis

The Gorkha-ness of the Nepalis will be the greatest enabler to confront the devastation caused by the earthquake.

Ashok K Mehta



Hours after Brits across pubs with names like *the Gorkha and Khukuri* in London and rest of UK had finished celebrating their 200-year old association – nay, kinship – with the Gorkha warriors of Nepal, the Himalayan kingdom turned secular republic was turned upside down with the long-predicted earthquake that devastated the temple town of Kathmandu. The historic Dharahara, the landmark tower known to some as Bhim Sen's Folly, built in 1832 by late Prime Minister Bhim Sen Thapa, which had survived previous earthquakes, submitted to the latest tectonic shift.

But even this massive earthquake will not cloud the dexterity of the famed Gorkhas charging with their khukuris belting the blood-curdling battle cry *Aayo Gorkhali* which helped in the creation of the British empire from the Falklands to Hong Kong. As the sun set on the British empire in India, the Indian Gorkhas were born in 1947 after the division of Gorkha assets between Britain and India, and they have continued to display their battle prowess for the defence of India.

A glorious tradition

The 1814-'15 Anglo-Nepal war stretching between the Bagmati and Sutlej rivers exhibited the fighting skills of the Gorkhas. On two earlier occasions, British military expeditions to subdue Nepal succeeded only partially, having had to be abandoned due to their failure to penetrate the malaria-ridden Terai region. This fortuitous turnabout led to the British East India Company being able to turn foe into friend while also stemming the tide of the surging Marathas and Sikhs in India.

On April 24, 1815, three battalions, one each of 1st, 2nd and 3rd Gorkha Rifles were raised with 1 and 3 Gorkha regiments going to India in 1947. Japanese, Germans, Italians and Turks have faced the brunt of the Gorkha battle cry fortified with their motto *Kaffir hunu banda marno ramro* (Better to die than to be a coward). In 1857, Gorkhas demonstrated their

loyalty and mettle to the British when they helped breach the siege of Delhi even as 14,000 Nepali soldiers led by Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana recaptured parts of Awadh.

The Gorkhas (pronounced and spelt Gurkhas, with a 'u' by the British) endeared themselves to the British Tommy and were called Johnny Gorkhas. Long before Gorkhas were recruited by the British East India Company, they would go to Lahore to join Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Punjab army. To this day, any Gorkha who joins the Army be it in Nepal, India or UK and the police in Singapore and Hong Kong and even retired Gorkhas being re-enlisted as private contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan are all called 'Lahure'. Little wonder they were called Gorkha globetrotters resulting in this memorable conversation between American journalist Walter Lippmann and US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles at the height of the Cold War.

John: "Hey ! We found new allies ! They are Gorkhas"

Walter: "But they're not from Pakistan"

John: "But they're Muslims"

Walter: "No, they're Hindus"

John: "Heck, who cares for detail, as long as they're on our side".

This anecdote led to people saying, "Let's call in the Gorkhas" (instead of the Marines).

As many as 51 Gorkha battalions fought under the British flag in the second World War and a few fewer units in the first World War. In 1947, the 2nd, 6th, 7th and 10th Gorkha Regiments stayed with the British Army while 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 8th and 9th Gorkhas opted to join the Indian Army. A new regiment, 11 GR was raised in 1948. Facing a cash crunch, the British Gorkhas first amalgamated the regiments, downsizing from a Gorkha Brigade of 20,000 to just 2000 today with two battalions simply numbered 1 and 2 Gorkha Rifles, shedding completely all historic affiliations. Of the two, one is permanently located in the UK and the other in Brunei where its Sultan foots the bill. Till 1997 the Gorkha Brigade was located in Hong Kong until it reverted to China and the Gorkhas were brought to UK.

No reasons to cheer

The Anglo-Nepal celebration will also be dampened by the fact that one Col Lama whose wife works in the UK was held in London two years ago while on leave from a UN

mission for alleged violations of human rights during the Maoist civil war in Nepal. The Nepal Army has already spent hundreds of thousands of pounds in British courts to have the case transferred to a Nepali court. The Nepal Army Chief Gen Gaurav Shamsheer Jung Bahadur Rana has told his British counterpart that much of the 'cheers' (Jai Gorakh) over rum-coke will be missing due to this aberration.

Nepal is also cut up with the UK over their protracted discrimination in treatment between Gorkha and British soldiers and its belated resolution. The pay and pension of British Gorkhas is regulated by a tripartite agreement of 1947 between India, Nepal and UK where British Gorkhas were to be treated on a par with Indian Gorkhas. That is history now but many residual cases are being contested in British courts. For many years, an entity calling itself Gorkha Army Ex Servicemen's Organisation (GAESO) was helping hundreds of Gorkhas and their families and next of kin to claim their entitlements. It included the case of a company of 7 Gorkhas which had mutinied while on a tour of duty in the Hawaii in the 1990s. There have been mutinies among Brunei Gorkhas and Singapore police. These were not restricted to the British Gorkhas as their Indian counterparts were also involved in uprisings on at least two occasions.

Legendary valour

Mutinies and revolts notwithstanding stories about Gorkha valour are legend. A soldier's General who endeared himself to the Gorkhas was Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw who was popularly nicknamed by the Gorkhas as 'Sum Bahadur'. Sam's famous quip is: 'If a man says he is not afraid of dying he is either lying or a Gorkha'.

On a special mission with Orde Wingates Chindits Force in Burma, Gorkhas were required to be dropped behind Japanese lines. When the fixed wing aircraft was 5000 feet above the drop zone, Top Bahadur Gurung, when asked to jump out, requested the pilot to lower the aircraft just a wee bit. "It won't make a difference" the pilot said, because you will have a parachute" the pilot said. "In that case, *theek chha* (it's ok)" replied Gurung.

The most tragic incident of the first invasion of Burma during the First World War was the rout of the British Indian Army at the hands of the Japanese culminating in the hasty retreat over the Sittang Bridge in which two Gorkha battalions – 2/5 GR and 1/3 GR – were virtually annihilated partly by the Japanese and partly by the

blowing up of the Sittang Bridge with bulk of the Gorkhas being either on the bridge or on the wrong end. To make matters worse, Gorkhas can't swim. For a few weeks the remnants of the two battalions were merged – this is the first time in modern war that this has happened – and called 5/3 GR till they were respectively re-raised and made fit for war.

The 2nd Fifth Gorkhas was to win three Victoria Crosses in the second Burma campaign, two in one action within 24 hours near Imphal and the third a year later. 1st Three Gorkha Rifles is in Calcutta and along with 1st First GR at Pathankot have celebrated their 200 years of youth last week with glory, gusto and gallons of Hercules rum. The Indian Army has 38 Gorkha battalions with around 40,000 troops, 80 per cent hailing from Nepal.

Anecdotes abound

No story of the Gorkhas is complete without this anecdote: having escaped from a Japanese jungle prison, three Gorkhas kept marching, armed with intuition and instinct, qualities cultivated in their mountain homes. They would run by day and tie themselves to the branches of trees to try and sleep by night avoiding the Japanese. Bedraggled, the three reached Imphal and, when searched, the Sikh military policemen found one of them had a map of Thailand.

The 2nd Five's Gaje Ghale who won his Victoria Cross in Burma was born in Barpak, the epicentre of the earthquake. Barpak and the villages in the area have been flattened. Gaje Ghale became so big in size thanks to an astonishing appetite, that he could never make the climb to Barpak. After several rum punches he would joke how he fantasised about food, making some exceptions. "Among the two-legged, I don't eat humans. Among the flying, no aeroplanes, and among four-legged, I avoid the charpoy. I eat everything else". Translated from Nepali to English this anecdote loses much of its flavour.

Giri Prasad Burathoki, a retired Subedar Major became the provincial governor and later the Defence Minister of Nepal. He told me how, before World War II, 2nd 5 Gorkhas had trained for the Middle East theatre while being located in the North West Frontier Province but landed up to fight in the jungles of Burma. Also how, the Mechanical Transport platoon took their driving lessons in the Commanding Officer's Austin car. He would say: "British officers loved and cared for us. It was both mutuality of pride and respect. But they kept us in the dark. At home, we were suppressed by the Ranas. Abroad the British did the same, keeping us on a tight leash. No mixing with Indian troops, minimal education and insistence on a shaven head. Only the chutia was allowed."

The Gorkhas are endowed with many skills and virtues. After 200 years some are worth recalling: "Gaiety, simplicity, bravery and loyalty; these the gifts they bring from their homes among the hills; vigour and stout-heartedness and pride befitting royalty; and love of high achievement and the strength that love instils". Two hundred years of distinguished soldiering have put a halo around the Gorkha in the hall of fame. In this hour of national calamity it is the Gorkha-ness of the Nepalis that will be the greatest enabler to confront the monumental tragedy.

Jai Gorakh! Jai Nepal. 🇳🇵

The author has been travelling in Nepal since 1959 and is a retired General Officer from the Fifth Gorkha Regiment.

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Bom Busty means “bud of a religious book” in the Lepcha language. It is believed to have been prophesized that the small buds would bloom to be beautiful flowers and spread its scent across the Hill side. In the early part of the last century, this place was densely forested. Majority of the inhabitants were simple, uneducated, indigenous Lepchas. Belief in malevolent sprits was highly prevalent. The light of God was nonexistent. It was the arrival of the Church of Scotland around 1870s that the Hills came to be filled with a different music. One of the first missionaries to arrive was Rev. William Macfarlane who had observed, “Over there is a place for planting another branch of the mission to operate chiefly among the Lepchas, I reached a spot called Kalimpong.” Soon, Rev. Macfarlane started spreading the Gospel in these hills with Sukhman Limbu, Laxman Singh, and Ganga Prasad Pradhan as his local help.

Rev. Macfarlane was an avid promoter of education and on 11.04.1886, he took 2 students and established a Teacher’s Training Center in Kalimpong. In that way a Mission Hall and a School Hall was constructed and in running these establishments he would be busy. One day he had gone to the jungle and returned with twigs and wood but the very next morning on 15.02.1887, he passed away at an early age of 47. But he is still fondly remembered as his graveyard still exists at the Macfarlane Church.

Following Macfarlane’s footstep was Sukhamn Limbu who was a resident of Kizom village. Limbu was actually appointed to spread the gospel in Bhutan. But in the years

BOM CHURCH

-James Karthak



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1882-83, he had worked in Bom Busty. Rev. Macfarlane had written about Sukhman Limbu, “Sukhman was the life and liveliness of the Bible Class. He embodies the natural qualities of being a lender. He had to sit outside and eat his meals as he was dubbed a “Christian dog” by the society. He would sleep outside the house or in the jungle. The society had basically out casted him; this was the biggest test of his faith in Christ. During the time of his Baptism, he was asked,” Do you really believed in Christ? Have you decided to walk with Christ for the rest of your life?” to which he responded.” I have given up on my mother, father, sister, brothers and society for Christ.” “ I have never seen such a strong willed person like him.”

During Limbu’s tenure in Bom Busty, the small flock was well cared by the leader whose dedication was exemplified in this easy character, simple language and in his lifestyle. The new believers then included Late Aakhon Simick, Late Dajyu Simick, Langkham Sandyang, Late Tachon Karthak and Late Padmalal Ghataney.

Rev. Macfarlane would also come from time to time to teach and fellowship with these new believers.

At that time, the Church Hall was located in the hill opposite the family house of Fredirck Sarkar. It was a thatched hall where Sukhman Limbu was aided by Bichar Singh Lepcha as the first teacher at the Night School.

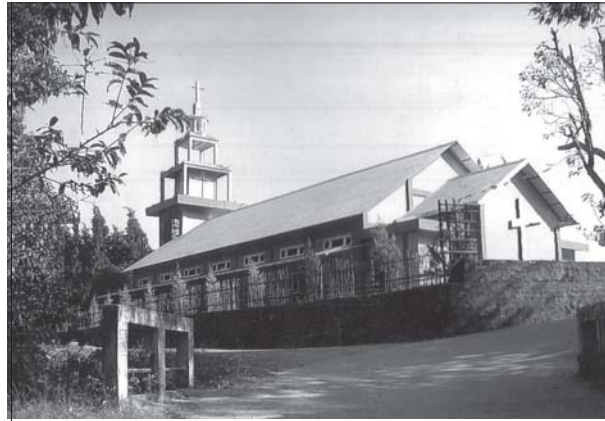
The word of God flourished across Bom Busty. Many families accepted Christ as their personal savoir and received water baptism as well. Very soon, Sukhman Limbu appointed his brother Mekbar Singh Limbu to lead Bom Church. Mekbar Singh Limbu had accepted Christ and was water baptized when he had gone to Kolkata to study. Although he was working in the Forest department

after his arrival, he very obediently left his job and became the Catechist of Bom Church. As for Sukhman Limbu, he became a victim of the widespread dysentery that had gripped the Hills at that time. And like many who had no access to medicine and cure, Sukhman Limbu also passed away.

After his death, Mekbar Singh Limbu officially took over the church affairs from 1884 to 1923. Since the church did not own either a building or the graveyard, it was decided to purchase the land where the church stands today. Chandarey Kami sold the land for Rs.150.00 and a Worship Hall was built there. The missionaries then conducted school during weekdays and a church service on Sundays. Bom church then becomes the rightful owners of the land which was constructed by the very hands and sweat of the hard working early members.

On request of 'Choti Panchayat', the governing body of the Church, in 1903 Mr. Campbell, the Land Revenue Officer, transferred the 3.5 acre of land in the name of "Christian Choti Panchayat" under the care of Mekbar Singh Limbu, the Catechist. The main purpose of transferring the name to the Panchayat was to construct the Church, School and Cemetery. Further the income from the landed property was to support the believers. Thus the first member to be buried in the cemetery was Late Akhon Simick.

At that time, majority of the church population were indigenous Lepchas and Limbus. Members of the church were simple and economically very weak. Education was minimal. The church had its own rites and rituals. They would



It was the arrival of the Church of Scotland around 1870s that the Hills came to be filled with a different music. One of the first missionaries to arrive was Rev. William Macfarlane who had observed, "Over there is a place for planting another branch of the mission to operate chiefly among the Lepchas, I reached a spot called Kalimpong."

school in Gail Tea Garden.



At that time, majority of the church population were indigenous Lepchas and Limbus. Members of the church were simple and economically very weak. Education was minimal. The church had its own rites and rituals. They would kill a goat or an Ox during funerals, feed the people and only then take care of the corpse

kill a goat or an Ox during funerals, feed the people and only then take care of the corpse. During the time of sowing, they would spend entire mornings in the fields and attend church in the evenings. They were simple believers. Christmas usually meant a huge feast for the whole church. There was an incident when the church service was in full swing and the noise of an airplane flying over made the preacher stop the service as he urged everyone, "let us now go and watch the plane" ending the service.

During the time of Makbar Singh Limbu, Rev. Mackenzie had come for invigilation and was impressed by the place and called it a "fruitful place." At that time, there were 36 families with 158 members and 14 Sunday school attendees at the Church. There were 24 students at the school. After Mekbar Singh Limbu, the church leadership was taken over by Andok Karthak, (1924-1960). Before accepting his role as the Catechist of the church, he was actually a teacher at a

During this time, the membership increased. There were a few renovations made to the Church hall and School and the Church was progressing spiritually as well. Every now and then, preachers from the Eastern Himalayan Church Council would visit and fellowship at Bom Church.

The youth-C.E was an important part of the church. Those involved were Late Gideon Dhondup, Late Erzer Tasho, Ganchho Lepcha, Choden Tasho, Late Mark Lepcha, Sunen Karthak, Late Sonam Dhendup, Mrs. Lily Karthak, Seth Karthak, Jordan Karthak, Mini Lepcha, Mrs. Ongmit Kabo, Ongbarmit Kabo, Late Ongtarmit Kabo, Late B.S.Chemjong, Late Munna Chemjong, Late Lachhi Sada, Mrs. Nunu Lepcha, Late Ramit Lepcha, Late Marsi Dhendup etc.

These youths conducted worship service, house fellowship and Sunday schools. They would participate in the annual "Christian Mela" that would be organized in the Macfarlane church. They would sing new choruses of praise and worship. There was unity and love amongst the youth. They were educated and full of energy. Among them, Late Sonam

Dhondup had even donated a big table and pulpit essentials to the church. During this time, the church was a group of simple believers. The spiritual, financial, educational level was far from what it is today. The Catechist Andok Karthak would don his long coat, carry a rod in his hand and visit each house to fellowship with them. The members of the church would respect and fear him. After Andok's death in 1960, elder Sethang Chemjong took over church responsibilities for a few months. Sethang Chemjong's demise meant the shifting of the Catechist responsibilities to his own brother, Late M.C.S. Chemjong from 1960

to 1981. But the absence of an ordained Pastor in Bom Church invited Rev. Sukhbir Rai from Sakyong church to assist in certain matters from 26.03.1967 to 31.12.1975. Others who helped include Rev. Elias Targain and Rev. Mikang Subba. Prior to accepting the Church responsibilities, M.C.S. Chemjong was studying medicine in Kolkata. He had then returned to Kalimpong and was working in Kalimpong Municipality. The Catechist Chemjong also started an association named O.G.B. for the old members of the Church. They would all meet once a year and discuss about Church matters. Every Sunday, the Catechist would also preach in both English and Nepali.

During the 1960s, Mrs. J. Serif, daughter of Dr. Grahams, assisted in the construction of the Church building. It was 20 feet by 18 feet. On 27.11.1960 the Church Hall was named Rev. Graham Memorial Hall, in gratitude for the help rendered by Mrs. Serif and in memory of the great man. Those present on that day were Catechist M.C.S. Chemjong,



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D.B.Pradhan, Daniel Namchu, Man Bahadur, Krishna Bahadur Pradhan, Suk Tshering Simick, PB. Tamang (Forest Guard),

J.B.Karthak, Koth Chemjong, Hamshing Lepcha, Temba Sada, D. Namchu, K.D.Sambar, B.C.Simick etc. Believers donated chairs, tables, cupboards etc for the new building. The Macfarlane Church too was given special lights brought from abroad. Late Rev. W.M.Scott dedicated the building on 20.10.1961. Following this on 04.01.1965, Bom Church took the very important decision to become a self supporting Church.

On 28.11.1965, the Church debated about resources or "Home Donations" to actually run the Church. Those participating in the discussion included R. Targain. S.T. Chemjong, J. Karthak, L. Tshering, Pemba Sada, Loren Lepcha, Man Tshering, C.D.Tasho, Sangit Simick, Swiba Simick, C.C.Simick, Solon Karthak, James Karthak, K.D. Samar, Rojal Elijah, and S.N. Karthak. It was thus decided to divide the church in three categories; those belonging to household 'A' were to give Rs.5.00 per month, 'B' were to give Rs.2.00 per month and those belonging to the 'C' category would contribute Rs. 1.00 per month.

On 26.03.1997, Bom Church conducted its first self-supporting meeting. Rev. S.B. Rai, Eld. Chemjong. N.S.Karthak, Sethang Chemjong, John Karthak. Kanden Sambar, Khapnan Sada, Daniel Namchu, Syambo Simick and Nima Tshering Karthak were present at the service. On this very day, representative of the Eastern Himalayan Council granted the self-supporting status to the church. The Eastern Himalayan council body was represented by

Bishop Dharmandan Pradhan the moderator, Secretary Luke Sugyan, and Treasure Harkaman Lama with Rev. Salanthyal Molomu, S.C.S Chemjong and other members of the



They were simple believers. Christmas usually meant a huge feast for the whole church. There was an incident when the church service was in full swing and the noise of an airplane flying over made the preacher stop the service as he urged everyone, "let us now go and watch the plane" ending the service.

committee. Since the church did not have its own pastor, Sukhbir Rai was appointed as the interim moderator for the time being.

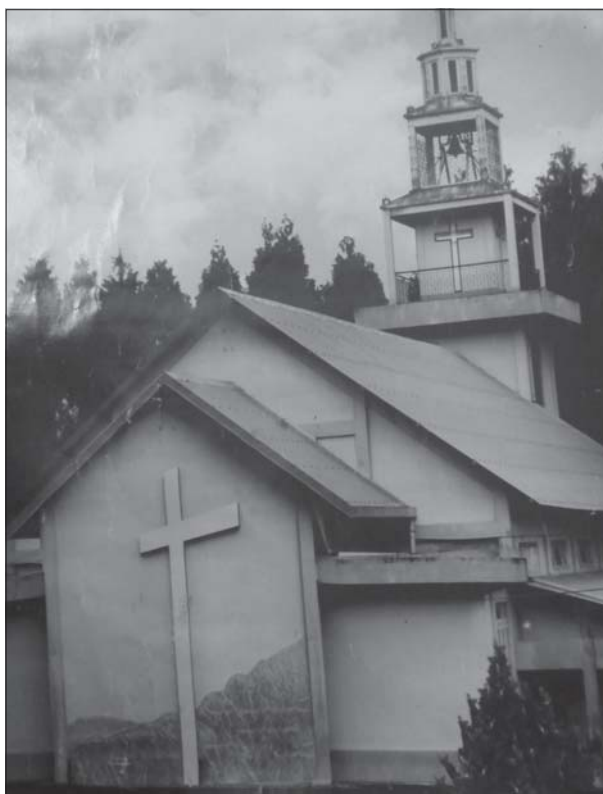
Elders appointed to lead the church included M.S.C.Chemjong, Nima Tahering Karthak, Sethang Chemjong, John Karthak, Kanden Sambar, Khapnen Sada, Syambo Simick and Daniel Namchu.

The main elders however were Late C. Simick, Sunen Karthak, John Karthak, K.D.Sambar, Dawa Lepcha, Namgyal Simick, Choden Simick, Aaden Lepcha etc.

Since the church did not have its own Pastor, it was decided that James Karthak was chosen to go and study theology as he even passed his exams to study at the Shrirampur Theological college. Unfortunately, the church had no money. So, it was suggested he join the 'Eastern Himalayan church council but the application was rejected because Bom church was not paying the yearly pledge. But God had different plans. It was the generous offer from Late. S. Sodamba that James Karthak got the opportunity to go and study in Dehradun Bible college. James Karthak was as pastor on January 4, 1976 by the Presbyterian moderator J.N. Najarni. With the growing church and the need for more leaders, Late. Sonam Dhondup, Late. Chyangdup Simick, Late Aaden Simick, Late. Ongdup Namchu, Late eden simick, Jongbar Kaboo, Daniel Lepcha, Buddhisingh Lepcha, Donald Karthak, Samuel Simick, Tshering Lepcha and Nima Lepcha were ordained as the church elders by Rev. James Karthak.

At that time, Bom church activates were handled in a Presbyterian manner because of its background. But today, the church is able to worship the Lord regardless of the denominational tags. The church fellowships were strong, with a turn up of men, women and children on Sunday Services. The youths had a strong group called C.E.

The church youths at that time included Late James Tasho, Hamsingh Lepcha, Palden Tasha, B.S. Chemjong, Munna



In BOM Busty one 'Combined fellowship' was started by members of different Churches with a vision to make spiritual unity was among different churches. Rev. J. Karthak was the president and Prakash Karthak was the secretary of this fellowship. Staying under own Church's rule and regulation they made fellowship with each other. Each church received plenty of blessings from this fellowship.

Chemjong while some of the senior youths were Dawa Simick, Seth Karthak, Jordan Karthak, Gideon Dhendup, Sonam Dhendup, Gen Tshering Lepcha etc. The younger generation included Solon Karthak, Donald Karthak, Norden Tasho, Late Lakpa Tasho, Erit Tasho, Luxman Bohra, Jonathan Tasho, Late Arnold Simick, Late Eden Simick, Raju Rai, Dennis Karthak.

The young women active in the youth were Minnie Lepcha, Rahel Tasho, Mongmit Tasho, Premit Tasho, Elishiba Tasho, Sunomit Lepcha, Rebecca Tasho, Dumkit Simick etc.

The church youth was very much interested in literature. Under the guidance of Solon Karthak as their youth leader, there were a lot of literature seminar and workshops. "Himali Standesh" edited by James Kaerthak was one of the hand printed magazines published by the church itself. Then after "Pratikchya" was the next magazine. Even "Bhetghat" by Raju Rai was birthed here. Bom church has also been gifted with very talented musicians and Lyricists. Some of the names worth mentioning are Donald Karthak, Dennis Karthak, Late Eden Simick, James Ongchuk, Arnold Simick, Suichang Simick etc. The church has also been successful in

producing musical albums for the glory of God.

BOM CHURCH and its interest in arts and literature cannot be ignored at all. The youths were also involved in dramas they presented over time. Some notable artists include Late Ronlad Karthak, Late. Arnold Simick, Late. Eden Simick, Norden Tasho, Dawa Ghising, Chenga Karthak, Umarki Karthak.

There was a time in 1980s when a huge storm destroyed the church hall but the received help from "Epicore". After 1981, it was N.S. Karthak who took the responsibility of the Catechist after Chemjong's death.

In 1982, the church celebrated its 100th birthday. The main speakers for this celebration were late. B.S Simick, Rev. Mikang Subba, Rev. B.D. Rai. "Smriti Ka Upahar" was the souvenir magazine published under the editorship of Rev. James Karthak.

Other speakers who have ministered in the church include Late. Motila {Masihi Bandana}, Rev. Robert Karthak, Campus Crusade for Christ, Nagaland ministries etc.

In BOM Busty one 'Combined fellowship' was started by members of different Churches with a vision to make spiritual unity among different churches. Rev. J. Karthak was the president and Prakash Karthak was the secretary of this fellowship. Staying under own Church's rule and regulation they made fellowship with each other. Each church received plenty of blessings from this fellowship. But due to misunderstanding among churches this fellowship was closed eventually. In this period 11 houses of Bom church went away and joined churches. That was the saddest moment of the Bom Church.

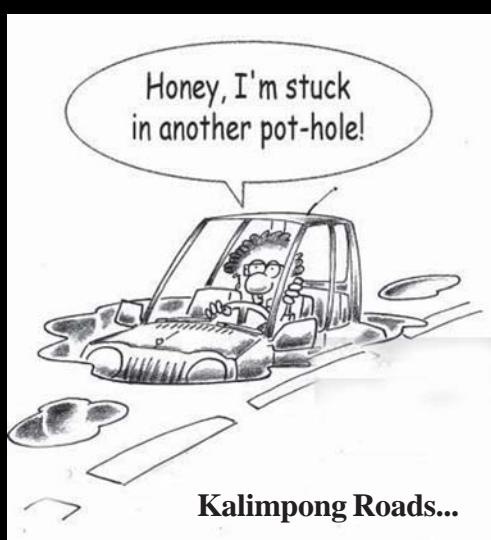
Again in 1994, there was a misunderstanding among the church leaders. From that year Rev. J. Karthak resigned from church service. But today the matter has been solved and become one again.

Bom church is passing through modern era. There are countless spiritual, academic and other developments in the church. In this period new church building has already been constructed. The believers of the church are contributing spiritually and financially for construction. Branch church is functioning in Sindebong since 1993. Similarly few families took baptism and a new branch church was established in Samalbong from 2007. Another branch church has already started functioning from this year in Deorali.

The new elders today include Erit Tasho, Dennis Karthak, Arjun Lepcha, Ham Singh Lepcha, T.T. Sambar, Amuel Lepcha, Robert Kabo & Anand Karthak who are actively in the Lord's service. Even in the short time, the elders have taken short term bible course, leadership trainings etc. The church has also appointed Prakash Karthak as their evangelist.

The women fellowship are also supporting actively in spiritual growth of the congregation in many ways. There are plenty of blessings to the church from their House fellowship. Today Youth wing are also actively involved in development of the church. Similarly the Men's Guild is also helping for the expansion of the church. Bom School is also running successfully.

After Rev. James Karthak no new pastor has been ordained so far. These days' church elders are smoothly taking church ahead in spiritual growth. The young Ashis Karthak of the church is studying theology in Pune these days. Pastor Samule Lepcha of UCNI is helping in special services of the church. 📷



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Prakriti Prabha Chettri

A MAGNIFICENT DREAM



The Queen awoke startled. It was still dark. The single oil lamp that had been left burning the night earlier had died a timely death, indicating that dawn wasn't far away and would in any moment shed her soft light, till it grew to its brightest; illuminating the whole world. The days were stretching to its longest length as *Jeth* had just given way to *Ashad* and was the beginning of a lovely month with everything green and fresh and pitter patter of rain every now and then. The peaches in the royal orchards were ripening and so were the deep red plums; covering everything in a blanket of sleep inducing aroma. The blue hills standing tall and proud could almost be heard heaving signs of pleasure awaiting a new day to be born. Faint and distant chirps flittered through the air and Kaushlyawati Shah could feel her heart beating an irregular drum; not at all in cord and her body was moist with warm sweat. The king lay in sweet slumber next to her unaware of the approach of a beautiful dawn. There was a strange feeling inside of her; something that she just could not explain. Suddenly her young bright face lit up and an accomplished smile played upon her fawn lips. It was thrilling!!! Not being able to contain herself any longer she abruptly turned towards the peacefully sleeping king; "Oh King, you have to wake up; I just had the strangest dream." She paused musing to herself lost in a delightful trance "it was the most beautiful dream I had ever seen... I am sure it was dream, but it felt so real... like as if there always was a cord between dream and life."

The king who had always been a light sleeper awoke instantly perturbed at his young wife's behavior. Nara Bhupal Shah was not old but his face was older than his years and his forehead had lines which was now crisscrossed like a *nanglo* making him look even more old. He had seen many things in life but never had he seen his wife in a state of such excitement, that too; at such an odd hour which could not be referred to as night nor could it be called day and there had always been stories of sinister origin to pollute anyone's mind in fearing it to be cursed. There was something in her spirit that was almost frightening. Her hazel eyes had a spark so intense that it seemed to light the whole room.

"Khaushalyawati, what is it? Are you unwell?"

“Have you not been listening my king!!” said the Queen in a frighteningly loud whisper.

She certainly must be possessed; thought the king.

“I had the most beautiful dream.”

Nara Bhupal Shah was more confused than ever; being a man of simple thought and a very content King. Why could his wife not have waited till morning to share her dreams if that was what she really wanted to!

“I dreamt that I was on a beautiful mountain top with snow all around me. The sun was rising and I was wearing the most fascinating jewels and everything glittered in the rising sun. The sun was so huge. It was just too splendid to be described in words. Curiously I suddenly had the urge to open my mouth. As I stood with eyes fixed staring at the sun with my mouth wide open, it moved towards me blazing so bright that I was blinded and before I could realize, it had entered my mouth and I had swallowed it. King, I swallowed the whole sun.... and it filled inside of me and shone through me and I could see distant lands from where I stood and I could hear mandir bells ringing gloriously till the far end.”

The queen stopped there and turned towards her king and husband. She looked divine. She looked like a goddess. All that the king could do was stare at her in amazement before raising his right arm and bringing it crashing upon his dear wife’s left cheek.

The king then turned away and went back to sleep without a single word or a single sound. Stunned silence sliced through the air.

The queen shocked beyond words stared in disbelief. What had happened!! What wrong had she done!! What was her crime!! What harm had she done in sharing something that had meant so much to her? Shock slowly turned to grief and huge tears began to roll down her cheeks silently. She could not lie in the same bed with the king any longer. Dawn was slowly turning brighter and brighter with every passing second. The queen could now clearly see the distant hills from her window, the ripening peaches and plums and hear the gurgle of a stream nearby. Gorkha was a beautiful place, especially in *Ashad*. It was cool and pleasant and seemed to caress her injured soul. She watched the birth of a new day. The queen gazed at the first rays of the sun. It was the second sunrise she had seen that day and it filled her with more grief. She cried fresh tears again. Seconds turned to minutes and minutes into an hour. It was now a bright morning and life in the palace had begun.

The King awoke. For the second time, the same day. He turned towards the window and saw his wife gazing at the world outside. He could sense her grief from her stiff posture and was absolutely sure that she had not slept a wink.

“Kaushalyawati” he called her gently.

The queen spun in rage.

“I must know what my crime was. I haven’t been able to give my mind rest wondering what is it that I did or said wrong,”

The king’s eyes were gentle. “You committed no crime, my dear... but you would have if I had not slapped you.”

The queen could not believe her ears. “what is that suppose to mean?”

“My love, you must understand that the dream you saw was no ordinary dream. It was a gift from God. The land of Gorkha has been blessed. It will now rise into a stronger and more powerful kingdom. Our defeats will be bygone stories of the past as victory now calls. The Earth and the Sun have jointly blessed us.”

“But why did you slap me Oh king. After all these years that I have known you, you seem the most strange today. If the dream that I saw was good, why did you slap me.” asked the Queen more puzzled than ever,

“Because dreams that are meant to come true are only seen moments before dawn and it always wakes one up and if one falls asleep even for a second after; the dream loses its meaning and just remains a mere vision.”

Prithvi Narayan Saha which translates into Earth Sun in Nepali: was born a premature baby seven months in the month of *Paush*. His birth marked a new day in history and especially of Nepal. He conquered all his surrounding territories including Patan, Bhaktapur and Kathmandu and unified Nepal. He was successful in annexing territories extending from Punjab to Sikkim which was taken later by India in the late 19th century.

P.S This is a story that I grew up listening to as my grandfather would often narrate it while we huddled around the fire on winter evenings. We never grew tired no matter how many times he narrated it. This is just a humble effort to document legends and folktales that are passed from one generation to the other. 📖



WITH THE HOPE TO COME AGAIN

One day I found a report about a small railway that climbed the slopes of the Himalayan range beginning its travel where tigers were still living and reaching a little town, just in front of the highest mountains of the world.

By Francesco Pozzato

My father had never been to Great Britain, but he had a special liking for the country and for its style of living. On the contrary he didn't have good feelings for Germany. When I grew up and could understand his opinion, I realized that the origin of this feeling went back to the events preceding the Second World War. Great Britain was for him, a fervent liberal man, the living symbol of democracy against the danger of the National

Socialism that time. He liked to wear English clothes, shoes and hats that he bought in Padova, the city where he attended the university.

On a wall of our dining room we still have a gilded frame, with a certificate bearing the British Coats of arms and the signature of Field Marshal Alexander, awarded to my father for the help giving to British soldiers avoiding them to be captured by the enemy. During the last period of the war he hid some soldiers in our country house; a very worthy action, but very dangerous for all family.

At the age of eight, instead of a Marklin railway, like all my friends, I received a large box, with a Horn by clockwork locomotive and some freight wagons inside. I played for many years with that train, carrying all kinds of things from one side of our garden to the other. Later it became a Hornby-Dublo railway, with locomotive No.6231 of the LMS, the wonderful 'Duchess of Atholl', which I still keep in a display cabinet in my studio.

Wanting to know more and more about the railway world, I began to collect books and magazines printed in England. It was impossible to find publication about trains in Italy at that time. My father, a civil engineer, had no particular interest for the railways. He preferred to drive cars and he later brought a Triumph TR3A, which he enjoyed to run very fast, wearing a wind jacket and cap, of course "Made in England". To the

country, tried to improve my knowledge of railways, searching for all I could on both real and model trains.

I don't remember very well how it happened: one day I found a report about a small railway that climbed the slopes of the Himalayan range beginning its travel where tigers were still living and reaching a little town, just in front of the highest mountains of the world. It contained a layout of the line, which saw a lot of curves and strange loops and 'backwards and forwards' sections, allowing the trains to run up over the mountain. There was also a drawing of the locomotives and some pictures too. Those engines looked very unusual and had a funny shape! As a child, I liked mountains very much, and, together with my father, I did long walk in the Dolomites. But on this railway, mountains and trains stood together! Who could I ask more? I fell in love with that little train at the first sight.

I got everything that was available about that small railway. In a map I found out where Darjeeling lay and my father told me that Darjeeling was well known because of its tea plantations, but he had never heard anything about its railway. I decided that I must go there as soon as possible. But life has its own plans and a lot of water had to pass under the bridges before that dream could become reality!

Finally the German tour operator, Mochel, whom I had already visited South Africa with, put in his catalogue a travel to India. Mumbai, Delhi, Agra, the Matheran, Nilgiri, the Darjeeling mountain railway, and Saharanpur with its large WPs and WGs, stood in the program. Tour leader was Tadej Brate, whose skill I had already tested during some previous tours.

It was my first time in India and I was very excited. I found it particularly interesting, both for the landscape and the railways, the travel from Mettupalayam to Connor. I was allowed travel on the engine and I could see some elephants working in the forest.

But deep in my heart I looked forward to seeing the tiny blue engines of the DHR 'B' Class. Before landing at Bagdogra airport, on a beautiful clear day, I could see the snow capped peaks of Everest and Kanchenjunga. Already the afternoon I could get out for a look at the shed, where a couple of engines were under light repair. I couldn't restrain myself to caress the locomotive! I really was deeply moved to at last be so near to them. The day after, we boarded the train to Sukna, a station that looked like an Austrian one. There we changed to

small bus and precede the train in some well-selected points in the middle of very tall trees. An idea that was most appreciated, to put two boys in charge of the level crossings on the cart road, who had the task to stop the cars and vans, just before the train arrived. I could barely wait to reach the first loop and zigzag. I wanted to see how it all took place and how the train could climb the steep mountain. I found a particularly nice section near Chunbatti loop, where the train looked so tiny as it appeared from behind a group of giant trees, before turning on itself and going on.

When we reached Kurseong it was becoming dark. The majority of the group thought it better to travel to Darjeeling by bus, but with only a few friends, I preferred going on by train. I still remember passing through the market in the vanishing light, among the counters of fruits and vegetables and the many dim lamps, that flicked in the thick smoke, erupted by the engine. Many boys jumped up and down the coaches, like squirrels. Then I fell asleep, leaning my head on the rucksack. We reached Darjeeling in the night and had to walk to the hotel.

I was just dreaming, when they knocked at the door: it was expected to go to the Tiger Hill, in order to see the sunrise on the Himalayan peaks. It was biting cold and a thick fog wrapped everything. We waited a long time but there was nothing to see; it was possible to cut the fog with a knife! Only late in the morning, when we were waiting for a train running up to Ghum, did the fog begin to vanish and we could see the peaks and Kanchenjunga. Of course they were no longer pink! We travelled to Kurseong. That day the train was on time and we attended the shunting in the station and then followed the train to Darjeeling.

Unfortunately the day after, we had to go to Delhi. As it often happens, one wants to see too many things at the time. I saw my last train leaving Rintone and looked at it, while it disappeared behind a curve, already thinking to the next time. But again meanwhile I heard about the setting up of the DHRS and I decided to join it. I got all the issues of the 'Darjeeling Mail' and all other publications issued by the Society. They gave me the opportunity to understand that this railway is not only a railway, but a particular universe, made of track and trains, of course, but also landscape, mountains, history

and people. I booked a place on a tour to India, organized by the Society in February 2000.

I met the friends at the Cinderella Hotel and was surprised to see so many people sharing with me the love for this railway and the knowledge that many of them had about the history of the 'Toy Train'. I met Peter Jordan, the tour leader, who was very kind with me, speaking slow and checking I had well understood all that we had to do.

The following day, riding both a small bus and the regular train, we could take many pictures and visit, led by the very competent director, the workshop in Tindharia. In the afternoon we went back to Siliguri by train.

I liked the atmosphere inside the small coaches: a young lady with her baby wore a delightful green dress and a boy played very sweet music. The day after we travelled by train on the up section of the line. In many stations it was wonderful to see groups of girls and boy, dressed in their colorful cloths, waiting for the trains. They were amazing days.

My regret was only not to be able to speak good English, which didn't allow me to speak fluently.

When the group left Darjeeling I decided to stay a few more days, I had booked at the Windamere Hotel. It was a very exciting experience to stay there, because of the charm of the place and the courtesy of the staff. I remember well Mrs. Tenduf La, who greeted the guests during dinner. She told me that very few Italian people had been before in her hotel and she asked me if I had any complaints or needs!

I shared my time visiting the town and its outskirts and caching all the trains, running after them by a jeep driver by a skilled man, who know all the most suitable places for good pictures. Then I went to Gangtok, in order to visit some Monasteries, the high mountains and a wonderful orchid show. I realized that those flowers, in an infinite number of shapes and colours, are native of Sikkim.

The visit to the Monasteries was rather tiring, because of the very steep paths, but it really was a very deep experience. A young monk, who had been to a meeting of different religion in Assisi, invited to say a prayer with him because, he added, "the God is only one". Among those high mountains, the snow, the blue sky and such amazing people it was not hard for him to persuade me.

By bus I reached the Cinderall, for a warm shower, a delicious dinner and sleep. The last day I had enough time to follow a train up to Ringtone, arriving back at Bagdogra airport, just in time for the flight to Delhi and Roma.

With the hope, of course, to come again.....and still have this hope.



A PROMISE

I've seen the shadow of death
like a green garden seen grey
with the eyes of the messenger from the other realm

like women who sell flesh
and

lonely men would like to take a bite...

tis like a young heifer

whose tail has been

the hanging rope

to cross the river of the dead

after passing away...

leaving behind patterns of DNA

the next generation of hope...

and perhaps a developed economy...

I've seen death play with

children hose games of yards n sticks...

The corn is unripe yet

crows are perched on a distant

willow by a grave...

they look at those who sleep at day

often to wake n etherize at night...

by by n by

looking for that glassy knob

that door >>>

to the garden

Holy books have often voiced...

Yet bent down over the weighty

brows of deeds when with breath they blew...

How could i promise her

a dream?

a silver platter and a ring of gold..

when

death has to offer me a higher realm...

a plane of peace...



Karan Raj Chettri

LEGEND OF BABA HARBHAJAN SINGH

Major “Baba” Harbhajan Singh (August 3, 1941 – September 11, 1967) was an Indian army soldier who died near the Nathula Pass in eastern Sikkim, India. He is revered by soldiers of the Indian army as the “Hero of Nathula” and the army men have also built a shrine in his honour. He has been accorded the status of saint by believers who refer to him as the Baba (saintly father). Many of the faithful people, chiefly Indian army personnel posted in and around the Nathula Pass and the Sino-Indian border between the state of Sikkim and Chinese occupied Tibet have come to believe his spirit protects every soldier in the inhospitable high altitude terrain of the Eastern Himalayas. As with most saints, the Baba is said to also grant favours presumably to those who revere and worship him.



LIFE AND MILITARY CAREER

Baba Harbhajan Singh born into a Sikh family on August 3, 1941 in the village of Batthe Bhaini in Punjab (India). He completed his preliminary schooling in a village school, and then did his matriculation from DAV High School in Patti in March 1955. In June 1956 he enrolled himself as a soldier in Amritsar and joined the Corps of Signals. On June 30, 1965 was granted a commission and posted to the 14 Rajput regiment. During the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war he served as an Adjutant of his unit. Later he was transferred to 18 Rajput. It was with this regiment that he met his end on September 11, 1967 in Sikkim.



DEATH AND ASSOCIATED LEGEND

Harbhajan Singh’s early demise at the young age of just 26 years is the subject of legends and religious veneration which has become popular folklore among Indian Army regulars (jawans), people back at his village and apparently also soldiers of the Red Army across the border guarding the Indo-Chinese border between Sikkim and Tibet. However, the official version of his death is that he was a victim of battle at 14500 feet of the Nathula Pass, Sikkim where there were many fierce skirmishes between the Indian Army and Chinese Red Army during the 1965 Sino-Indian war. He was posthumously awarded the Maha Vir Chakra medal for his bravery and martyrdom on September 11, 1967.

However, according to legend, Harbhajan Singh drowned in a glacier while trying to lead a column of mules carrying supplies to a remote outpost. As the first casualty of the 23rd Punjab Regiment in that war, a manhunt was launched to find him. His remains were found after three days and he was cremated with full military honours. The legend further claims that it was Harbhajan Singh

who himself helped the search party to find his body. Still later, through a dream, he instructed one of his colleagues to build and maintain a shrine in his memory.

Some Indian soldiers believe that in the event of a war between India and China, Baba would warn the Indian soldiers of any impending attack at least the three days in advance. During flag meetings between the two nations at Nathula, the Chinese set a chair aside to honour of Harbhajan Singh who has since come to be known as saint (“Baba”). Every year on September 11, a jeep departs with his personal belongings to the nearest railway station, New Jalpaiguri, from where it is then sent by train to the village of

Kuka, in Kapurthala district in Punjab. While empty berths on any train of the Indian Railways are invariably allocated to any passenger without a confirmed reservation (Reservation against cancellation, RAC, or wait listed) or on a first come first served basis by the coach attendants, a special reservation for the Baba is actually made for him and his berth left empty for the entire journey to his home town every year with other soldiers accompanying “him” so as to reach him till his home. A small sum of money is also

contributed by soldiers posted in Nathula to be sent to his mother each month.

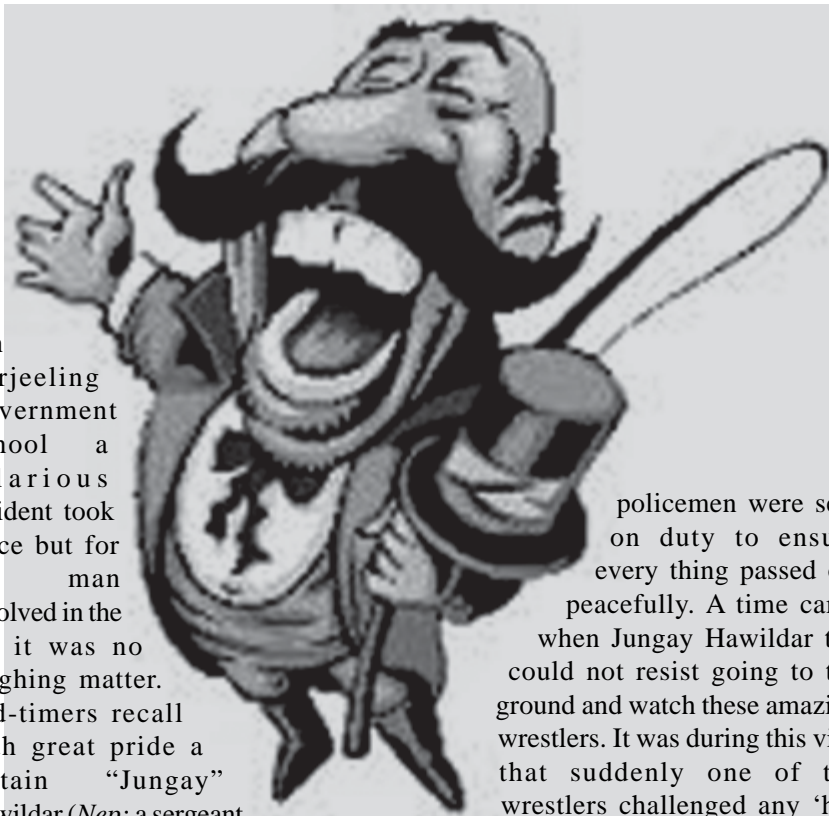
Many other stories about him have spread among believers, many of which also found their way into social networks. While all these stories often contain elements of supernatural sightings and events, there is very little evidence besides anecdotal tales which cannot be reliably verified or traced to their source. He has been attributed the character traits of a disciplined warrior who was a “stickler for following rules” and is said to have fallen out with comrades in arms because of this reason. Given the deeply held beliefs and the warrior traditions of the culture of his ethnicity (Sikhs), it is highly probable such uncompromising disciplinarian character idealized by the believers may have been projected on to him as further evidence of his saintliness even though there is no confirmed or authentic evidence of it in any cited records.

There are also stories of soldiers discovering that he visited the camps at night, used the bedclothes and boots in his room and on that can be found in various social network posts about him. It has also been claimed that the regiment still keeps an empty bed and other items of daily use. Some sources suggest that he continues to draw a major’s salary every month till date.

JUNGAY HAWILDAR



Dr. Sonam B. Wangyel



In Darjeeling Government School a hilarious incident took place but for the man involved in the act it was no laughing matter. Old-timers recall with great pride a certain “Jungay” Hawildar (*Nep*: a sergeant with a moustache) who not only had an impressive figure but an equally impressive pair of moustache. (He is not to be confused with the other Jungay Hawildar of more recent times who served the police around the sixties and seventies.) Nobody dared antagonize him and his strict vigil kept the town free of mischief and misdemeanor.

One day a group of heavyweight wrestlers came to Darjeeling and began to demonstrate their skills in the Government High School ground. The news of the arrival and their great skill at wrestling spread fast among the simple hill people. A large crowd would gather everyday at the ground and watch in amazement at the way these giants from the plains grappled and tossed each other. With the crowd growing in size,

policemen were sent on duty to ensure every thing passed off peacefully. A time came when Jungay Hawildar too could not resist going to the ground and watch these amazing wrestlers. It was during this visit that suddenly one of the wrestlers challenged any ‘hill man’ to a bout of wrestling with

him. After being witness to their tremendous skill, stamina and strength no one dared to take up the challenge. The ground was swathed in a humble and embarrassed silence when all of a sudden someone pushed Jungay Hawildar on to the muddy arena to the feeble cheers of the crowd. The hill folks, not really confident of their hero, had thought he voluntarily accepted the challenge while the Hawildar knew that he had been badly trapped. He could not shy away for the risk of losing his enormous reputation, there was honour and personal pride at stake, but he had never wrestled before. Come hell or the Devil himself, Jungay Hawildar had to hold his ground. Not knowing what to do, he imitated the wrestlers by spreading his legs wide apart and waited. The wrestler in a lightning move went down, slipped underneath and tried to kick one of Jungay’s legs out of balance. Jungay was equally quick to respond, and knowing no nothing about wrestling rules, managed to get the torso of the wrestler between his pair of legs and thighs. Jungay

increased his vice-like grip and oblivious to the rules of the game kept on increasing the pressure. With the wrestler in obvious distress the hill folks who had been earlier pressured into silence began to be jubilant. The atmosphere now was charged with suspense as to when the mighty wrestler would surrender. In fact the hefty wrestler from the plains had already done so by slapping the mud thrice with his right palm. But neither Jungay Hawildar nor the crowd were versed in the formalities of wrestling and when the crowd started chanting, “Na chhor tyaslai” (Don’t release him) Jungay squeezed even harder. Just when the people were beginning to feel the day to be the best in their lives the fight ended in an anticlimax. The Hawildar suddenly released the wrestler and without a word or a gesture returned towards his station. It was only after sometime that the people found out that the wrestler had soiled his clothes from his posterior which explained the Hawildar’s abrupt departure: the stench had hit the Hawildar’s sensitive nose so badly that he needed some unpolluted fresh air. ■



VIEW OF MELA GROUND BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

